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A Pulitzer Winner Gets Apple's Reconsideration

By BRIAN STELTER

Here's a digital-age perk of winning a Pulitzer Prize: Apple might be a whole lot nicer to you and your work.

On Monday Mark Fiore became the first online-only cartoonist to win a Pulitzer, for weekly animated videos published on SFGate.com, the Web site of The San Francisco Chronicle. In a subsequent interview with the Nieman Journalism Lab, he recalled that Apple had rejected his iPhone application in December since it included cartoons that mocked public figures.

Political cartoons, it turns out, can violate Apple's license agreement with developers, which states that applications, or "apps," can be rejected if the content "may be found objectionable, for example, materials that may be considered obscene, pornographic or defamatory."

Apple alone determines what is objectionable for its online app store, a practice that has come under close scrutiny. In its message to Mr. Fiore in December, the company cited his cartoon's allusions to torture and to last year's White House party crashers as examples.

After Mr. Fiore received the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning and after he mentioned his app's rejection in an article published on niemanlab.org on Thursday; he was encouraged by Apple to resubmit it. Mr. Fiore did so on Friday morning and is awaiting a response.

When his NewsToons app, which displays his weekly animated cartoons, was developed last year, Mr. Fiore said, he had not heard of "the whole concept of getting rejected for ridiculing public figures."

"That's what I do. That's my life!" he said in a telephone interview on Friday from San Francisco. "That's a tough one to get around if you're a political cartoonist."

His Pulitzer win is notable for at least three reasons. In addition to being the first Pulitzer for online-only work, it is the first awarded solely for animated video, as opposed to traditional cartoon strips or panels. Mr. Fiore is also the first self-syndicated editorial cartoonist to win the prize.

After NewsToons was turned down by Apple in December, Mr. Fiore did not try to submit it again, "mainly because it seemed like it would be so daunting."

"It's not like I had a phone number for someone at Apple," he said, adding that "interestingly enough, I do now."

An Apple spokeswoman did not comment Friday afternoon, but Steve Jobs, the Apple chief executive, apparently responded to a customer who asked about Mr. Fiore's app. "This was a mistake that's being fixed," the e-mail message, which was forwarded by the customer to The New York Times, stated. Mr. Jobs is known to reply to customers from his personal Apple address.

Cases like Mr. Fiore's have raised questions about Apple's policies toward apps with news content; Ryan Chittum, a writer for cjr.org, the Columbia Journalism Review Web site, asserted on Thursday that news media groups should withdraw their new iPad applications "unless Apple cedes complete control over the right to publish."

Mr. Fiore, who noted that he used Apple products to create his cartoons, said he felt a bit guilty that his sudden publicity apparently helped his cause.

"Sure, mine might get approved, but what about someone who hasn't won a Pulitzer and who is maybe making a better political app than mine?" he asked. "Do you need some media frenzy to get an app approved that has political material?"

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